

## PROSPECT: OR, VIEW OF THE MORAL WORLD.

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1805.

NO. 7.

### COMMENTS UPON THE SACRED WRITINGS OF THE JEWS AND CHRISTIANS.

#### BOOK OF LEVITICUS.

WHATEVER tarnishes the intellectual glory of the supreme being, or strips him of the benevolent affections of his nature, ought not to be denominated a divine revelation; but on the contrary it is proof upon the face of the record, that God has had nothing to do with it, for he cannot and he will not speak against himself. In the 26th Chapter of this Book, however, there is a string of curses with which God has threatened his chosen people, in case of certain specified defects of conduct, and these curses include in them such brutal ferocity of character and temperament, as would effectually disgrace the most uncultivated savage. Punishment for crimes is undoubtedly necessary and proper; no one, however, but the Jewish God, is capable of exhibiting such proofs of malignant asperity, as those which are exhibited in this chapter. He says, in verse 16th—"I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart; and ye shall sow your seed in vain; for your enemies shall eat it." And in verse 29, it is said—"And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall you eat." The first of the threats is sufficiently cruel and malignant, and marks the character of a savage, instead of a God; but the second is a thousand times more detestable, and places the Jewish Jehovah upon a par with the barbarians of modern and ancient times, who, in certain cases, are said to have fed upon human flesh. This brutal command of this national divinity, lets down his character below all conception, and proves that the book in which it is found, is not a divine revelation from God, but an imposition upon the world. If any Deistical writer of the present day, were to insert such a clause in his book, and advise his readers to eat up their own children, there would be, and with great justice too, a hue and cry of vengeance after him, through the whole country! Look, then ye believers in the Old Testament, to the bloody, brutal, barbarous, and murdering commands, contained in this book of Leviticus, and after perusing it with attention, once more ask yourselves this important question—Is this book true, is it divine, is it honourable to God, or is it useful to man? Some of it is so indelicate that nobody can read it without blushing for the bestial indecency of the priesthood, and a great deal of it is so foolish, that it is not worth reading. Under these circumstances, it would be much for the honour, as well as the interest of society, to turn its attention to the sublime and immortal truths of the moral and physical world, and leave these filthy systems of ancient theology to sink into that universal contempt which the progress of science and virtue is preparing for them.

## FOR THE PROSPECT.

*Remark on a passage of Paul, in the 9th chapter of Romans, 18th verse, and following.*

Addressed to the Ministers of the Calvinistical Church.

PAUL, in speaking of God, says, "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.—Thou wilt then say unto me, why doth he yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will?—Nay, but who art thou. O man, that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonour?"

I shall leave to Calvinists and Universalists to wrangle about these expressions, and to oppose or corroborate them, by other passages from other books of the Old or New Testament. I shall go to the root at once, and say, that the whole passage is presumption and nonsense. Presumption, because it pretends to know the private mind of God; and nonsense, because the cases it states, as parallel cases, have no parallel in them, and are opposite cases.

The first expression says, "therefore hath he (God) mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth." As this is ascribing to the attribute of God's power, at the expense of the attribute of his justice, I, as a believer in the justice of God, disbelieve the assertion of Paul. The Predestinarians, of which the loquacious Paul was one, appear to acknowledge but one attribute in God, that of *power*, which may not improperly be called the *physical attribute*. The Deists, in addition to this, believe in his moral attributes, those of justice and goodness.

In the next verses, Paul gets himself into, what in vulgar life is called, a hobble, and he tries to get out of it by nonsense and sophistry; for having committed himself by saying, that "God hath mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth," he felt the difficulty he was in, and the objections that would be made, which he anticipates, by saying, "Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he (God) yet find fault? for who hath resisted his will? Nay, but, O man, who art thou, that repliest against God!" This is neither answering the question, nor explaining the case. It is downright quibbling and shuffling off the question, and the proper retort upon him would have been, "Nay, but who art thou, presumptuous Paul, that puttest thyself in God's place!" Paul, however, goes on and says, "Shall the thing formed, say to him that formed it, why hast thou made me thus?" Yes, if the thing felt itself hurt, and could speak, it would say it. But as pots and pans have not the faculty of speech, the supposition of such things speaking, is putting nonsense in the place of argument, and is too ridiculous even to admit of apology. It shews to what wretched shifts sophistry will resort.

Paul, however, dashes on, and the more he tries to reason, the more he involves himself, and the more ridiculous he appears. "Hath not, says he, the potter power over the clay of the same lump, to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" In this metaphor, and a most wretched one it is, Paul makes the potter to repre-



gent God ; the lump of clay, the whole human race ; the vessels unto honour, those souls "on whom he hath mercy because he will have mercy ;" and the vessels unto dishonour, those souls "whom he hardeneth (for damnation) because he will harden them." The metaphor is false, in every one of its points, and if it admits of any meaning or conclusion, it is the reverse of what Paul intended, and the Calvinists understand.

In the first place, a potter doth not, because he cannot make vessels of different qualities, from the same lump of clay ; he cannot make a fine china bowl, intended to ornament a side-board, from the same lump of clay that he makes a coarse pan, intended for a close-stool. The potter selects his clays for different uses, according to their different qualities, and degrees of fineness and goodness. Paul might as well talk of making gun-flints from the same stick of wood of which the gun-stock is made, as of making china bowls from the same lump of clay of which are made common earthen pots and pans. Paul could not have hit upon a more unfortunate metaphor for his purpose, than this of the potter and the clay ; for if any inference is to follow from it, as a metaphor, it is, that as the potter selects his clay for different kinds of vessels, according to the different qualities and degrees of fineness and goodness in the clay, so God selects for future happiness, those among mankind who excel in purity and good life, which is the reverse of predestination.

In the second place, there is no comparison between the souls of men, and vessels made of clay ; and, therefore, to put one to represent the other, is a false position. The vessels, or the clay they are made from, are insensible of honour or dishonour. They neither suffer nor enjoy. The clay is not punished, that serves the purpose of a close-stool, nor is the finer sort rendered happy that is made into a punch-bowl. The potter violates no principle of justice in the different uses to which he puts his different clays ; for he selects as an artist, not as a moral judge ; and the materials he works upon know nothing, and feel nothing, of his mercy or his wrath. Mercy or wrath would make a potter appear ridiculous, when bestowed upon his clay. He might kick some of his pots to pieces.

But the case is quite different with man, either in this world or the next. He is a being sensible of misery as well as of happiness, and therefore Paul argues like an unfeeling idiot, when he compares man to clay, on a potter's wheel, or to vessels made therefrom ; and with respect to God, it is an offence to his attributes of justice, goodness, and wisdom, to suppose he would treat the choicest work of creation like inanimate and insensible clay. If Paul believed that God made man after his own image, he dishonours it, by making that image and a brick-bat to be alike.

The absurd and impious doctrine of predestination, a doctrine destructive of morals, would never have been thought of, had it not been for some stupid passages in the Bible, which priest-craft at first, and ignorance since, have imposed upon mankind as revelation. Nonsense ought to be treated as nonsense, wherever it be found ; and had this been done, in the rational manner it ought to be done, instead of intimating and mincing the matter, as has been too much the case, the nonsense and false doctrine of the Bible, with all the aid that

priest-craft can give, could never have stood their ground against the divine reason that God has given to man.

Doctor Franklin gives a remarkable instance of the truth of this, in an account of his life, written by himself. He was in London at the time of which he speaks. "Some volumes, says he, against Deism, fell into my hands. They were said to be the substance of Sermons preached at Boyle's Lectures. It happened that they produced on me an effect precisely the reverse of what was intended by the writers; for the arguments of the Deists, which were cited in order to be refuted, appeared to me more forcible than the refutation itself. In a word, I soon became a perfect Deist."—N. York edition of Franklin's Life, page 95.

All America, and more than all America knows Franklin. His life was devoted to the good and improvement of man. Let, then, those who profess a different creed, imitate his virtues, and excel him if they can.

*A Believer in the Moral Justice of God.*

[FROM THE FREEMAN'S JOURNAL.]

The following is an extract of an original letter from the venerable Franklin, to a minister of a church in the south part of New-Jersey, which has recently been discovered among some old family papers. It is a composition perfectly in the manner and spirit of that great and worthy man.

*Philadelphia, June 6, 1753.*

DEAR SIR,

I RECEIVED your kind letter of the third inst. and am glad to hear that you increase in strength. I hope you will continue mending, until you recover your former health and firmness. Let me know whether you still use the cold bath, and what effect it has.

As to the kindness you mention, I wish it could have been of more serious service to you; but if it had, the only thanks I should desire, are, that you would always be ready to serve any other person who may need your assistance, and so let good offices go round; for mankind are all of a family. For my own part, when I am employed in serving others, I do not look upon myself as conferring favours, but as paying debts. In my travels, and since my settlement, I have received much kindness from men, to whom I shall never have an opportunity of making the least direct return; and numberless mercies from God, who is infinitely above being benefited by our services. These kindnesses from men I can, therefore, only return to their fellow-men; and I can only shew my gratitude to God by a readiness to help his other children, and my brethren; for I do not think that thanks and compliments, though repeated weekly, can discharge our real obligations to each other, and much less to our Creator.

You will see, in this my notion of good works, that I am far from expecting to merit heaven by them. By heaven we understand a state of happiness, infinite in degree and eternal in duration. I can do nothing to deserve such a reward. He that for giving a draught of water to a thirsty person should expect to be paid with a good plantation, would be modest in his demands, compared with those who think they



deserve heaven for the little good they do on earth. Even the mixed imperfect pleasures we enjoy in this world, are rather from God's goodness than our merit ; how much more so the happiness of heaven ? For my part, I have not the vanity to think I deserve it, the folly to expect it, or the ambition to desire it ; but content myself in submitting to the disposal of that God who made me, who has hitherto preserved and blessed me, and in whose fatherly goodness I may well confide, that he never will make me miserable, and that the affliction I may at any time suffer, may tend to my benefit.

The faith you mention has doubtless its use in the world ; but I wish it were more productive of good works than I have generally seen it. I mean real good works ! works of kindness, charity, mercy, and public spirit ; not holy-day keeping, sermon hearing or reading, performing church ceremonies, or making long prayers, filled with flatteries and compliments, despised even by wise men, and much less capable of pleasing the Deity.

The worship of God is a duty ; the hearing and reading may be useful ; but if men rest in hearing and praying, as too many do, it is as if the tree should value itself on being watered and putting forth leaves, though it never produced any fruit.

Your good master thought much less of these outward appearances than many of his modern disciples. He preferred the *deeds* of the word to the hearers ; the son that seemingly refused to obey his father, and yet performed his commands, to him that professed his readiness, but neglected the work, the heretical but charitable Samaritan to the uncharitable but orthodox priest and sanctified Levite. And those who gave food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, and raiment to the naked, entertainment to the stranger, and relief to the sick, and although they never heard of his name, he declares shall in the last day be accepted ; when those who cry Lord ! Lord ! who value themselves on their faith, though great enough to perform miracles, but have neglected good works, shall be rejected. He professed that he came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance, which implied his modest opinion, that there were some in his time so good that they need not hear even him for improvement. But now-a-days we have scarcely a little parson, that does not think it the duty of every man within his reach to sit under his petty ministration, and that whoever omits this offends God. I wish to such more humility, and to you health and firmness.

Being your friend and servant,

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN.

---

#### FOR THE PROSPECT.

##### ESSENCE OF BEING.

It is said that there are not many certain truths in the world ; and again it is said, that all is composed of the four common elements, earth, air, fire, and water ; but each of these in their order. When, generally speaking, it may be affirmed that there are not many truths in the world ; but when we descend to particulars, they multiply to infinitude, and these are of that kind which we call self-evident, and all truth, so far as necessarily respects man, is self-evident, and by a fair investigation brings that conviction with it, which makes it impossible, according to the nature of things, that it should be otherwise.

Hence it appears, that the nature of things is the evidence of truth, because it is founded on fact, for truth is facts, and God is truth.

Should these premises be true (and we presume they are) and from them to reason right, the conclusion will be true. Otherwise let us reason ever so correctly from false premises, the conclusion will be false in exact proportion to the error in the premises. However, we shall in the next place endeavour to shew, that when we descend to particulars, these kind of self-evident truths will multiply to infinitude; for it will appear to be a simple fact, to every reflecting, unprejudiced mind, that every animated being in nature has certain faculties suited to his particular or individual formation. Nay, every organized body in nature, whether animate or inanimate, has certain faculties suited to his specified complexion or organization; and also that their faculties are their unalienable rights suited to the essence of their being. Hence it is from the laws of nature, which are the laws of individual existence, we derive the principle of individual equality of rights. And also that the faculties of nature are her laws, which are the laws of society (reciprocal justice) the laws of nations, the laws of the universe, and the law of God. And all human ordinances not founded on these, we esteem artificial and political, and are imposed upon the credulous for the purpose of fraud and deception. For if the Supreme Governor of the universe be a perfect being, the laws of nature were primarily established by him; therefore the laws of nature are perfect, and ought to be the primordial model for all human governments.

PUPIL OF NATURE.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES.

ÆSOP, the Phrygian, lived in the time of Solon, about the 50th Olympiad, under the reign of Cræsus, the last king of Lydia. St. Jerome, speaking of him, says, he was unfortunate in his birth, condition, and death; hinting thereby at his deformity, servile state, and tragical end. His great genius, however, enabled him to support his misfortunes; and in order to alleviate the hardships of servitude, he composed those entertaining and instructive fables, which have acquired him so much reputation; and he is generally supposed to have been the inventor of that kind of writing. Having had several masters, for he was born a slave, Æsop at length came under a philosopher named Zanthus. It was in his service that he first displayed his genius; Zanthus being one day walking in the fields, a gardener asked him why those plants, which he nursed with so much care, did not thrive so well as those which the earth produced without any cultivation? The philosopher ascribed all to Providence, and continued his walk; but Æsop, having stopped with the gardener, compared the earth to a woman, who always regards her own children more affectionately than those to whom by a second marriage she may become step-mother: the earth, said he, is the step-mother to laboured and forced productions, but the real mother to her own natural produce. Æsop was afterwards sold to Idmon, or Iadmon, the philosopher, who enfranchised him. After he had recovered his liberty, he soon acquired a great reputation amongst the Greeks; so that, according to Meziriac, the report of his wisdom having reached Cræsus, this king sent to enquire



after him, and engaged him in his service. He travelled through Greece, according to the same author ; whether for his own pleasure, or upon the affairs of Cræsus, is uncertain ; and passing by Athens, soon after Athens had usurped the sovereign power, and finding that the Athenians bore the yoke very impatiently, he told them the fable of the frogs who petitioned Jupiter for a king. Some relate, that, in order to shew that the life of man is full of miseries, Æsop used to say, that when Prometheus took the clay to form man, he tempered it with tears. The images made use of by Æsop, are certainly very happy inventions to instruct mankind ; they have all that is necessary to perfect a precept, being a mixture of the useful with the agreeable. Æsop was put to death at Delphi. Plutarch tells us, that he came there with a great quantity of gold and silver, being ordered by Cræsus to offer a sacrifice to Apollo, and to give a considerable sum to each inhabitant ; but a quarrel arising betwixt him and the Delphians, he sent back the sacrifice and the money to Cræsus ; for he thought that those, for whom the prince designed it, had rendered themselves unworthy of it. The inhabitants of Delphi contrived an accusation of sacrilege against him, and, pretending they had convicted him, threw him headlong from a rock. They afterwards endeavoured to make an atonement, by raising a pyramid to his honour.

NICHOLAS AMHURST, born at Marden, in Kent, but in what year is uncertain. He received his grammatical education at Merchant Taylor's School, in London ; and thence was removed to St. John's College, Oxford, but expelled for irregularity of conduct. Soon after Mr. Amhurst quitted Oxford, he seems to have settled in London, as a writer by profession. He published a volume of Miscellanies (principally written at the university) on a variety of subjects ; partly originals, and partly paraphrases, imitations, and translations ; and consisting of tales, epigrams, epistles, love-verses, elegies, and satires. But the principal literary undertaking of Mr. Amhurst was, "The Craftsman," which was carried on for a number of years with great spirit and success, and was more read and attended to than any production of the kind which had hitherto been published in England. Ten or twelve thousand were sold in a day ; and the effect which it had in raising the indignation of the people and in controlling the power of administration, was very considerable. In this work he was assisted by lord Bolingbroke and Mr. Pulteney, and probably by other leaders of the opposition. Notwithstanding Mr. Amhurst's merit with his party, however, he was totally neglected by them when they made their terms with the crown ; he died soon after, of a fever, at Twickenham, April 27, 1742 ; and his disorder was probably occasioned, in a great measure, by the ill usage he had received. Mr. Ralph, in his "Case of Authors," speaks with a just feeling and indignation upon the subject ; and Mr. T. Davies, the bookseller, in "Lord Chesterfield's Characters reviewed," p. 42—44, expresses himself concerning the treatment of Mr. Amhurst, in the following terms : "But if the earl of Bath had his list of pensioners, how comes it that Amhurst was forgotten ? The fate of this poor man is singular. He was the able associate of Bolingbroke and Pulteney in writing the celebrated weekly paper called the Craftsman. His abilities were un-

questionable ; he had almost as much wit, learning, and various knowledge, as his two partners ; and when those great masters chose not to appear in public themselves, he supplied their places so well, that his essays were often ascribed to them. Amhurst survived the downfall of Walpole's power, and had reason to expect a reward for his labours. If we excuse Bolingbroke, who had only saved the shipwreck of his fortunes, we shall be at a loss to justify Pulteney, who could with ease have given this man a comfortable income. The utmost of his generosity to Amhurst, that I ever heard of, was a hogshead of claret ! He died, it is supposed, of a broken heart, and was buried at the charge of his honest printer, Richard Francklin."

**SIR EDMUND ANDERSON**, a younger brother of a good family in Lincolnshire, descended originally from Scotland. In 1582, he was made lord chief justice of the common pleas ; and the year following received the honour of knighthood. He was a very strict lawyer, and governed himself entirely by statutes ; this he shewed on many occasions, particularly at the trial of Henry Cuffe, secretary to the earl of Essex, where the attorney general charging the prisoner syllogistically, and Cuffe answering him in the same style, lord chief justice Anderson said smartly, " I sit here to judge of law, and not of logic ;" and directed Mr. Attorney to press the statute of Edward III. on which Mr. Cuffe was indicted. He was reputed severe, and strict in the observation of what was taught in courts, and laid down as law by reports ; but we have his express declaration to the contrary, and that he neither expected precedents in all cases, nor would be bound by them where he saw they were not founded upon justice, but would act as if there were no such precedents. Of this we have a proof from the reports in his time, published by Mr. Goldesborough : " The case of Resceit was moved again : and Shuttleworth said, that he cannot be received, because he is named in the writ ; and said, that he had searched all the books, and there is not one case where he which is named in the writ, may be received." " What of that ?" said judge Anderson, " shall we not give judgment, because it is not adjudged in the books before ? we will give judgment according to reason ; and if there be no reason in the books, I will not regard them." His steadiness was so great, that he would not be driven from what he thought right, by any authority whatever. He concurred with his brethren in remonstrating boldly against several acts of power practised in Elizabeth's reign. On the accession of king James he was continued in his office, and held it to the time of his death, which happened August 1, 1605. The printed works of this great lawyer are, 1. " Reports of many principal Cases argued and adjudged in the time of Queen Elizabeth, in the Common Bench : " London, 1644, folio. 2. " Resolutions and Judgments on the Cases and Matters agitated in all the Courts of Westminster, in the latter end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth : " published by John Goldesborough, Esq. prothonotary of the Common Pleas, London, 1653, 4to.

---

NEW-YORK:

Published every Saturday, by ELIHU PALMER, No. 26, Chatham-Street....Price Two Dollars a-year, paid in advance.